

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME, WATER TOWER
900 King Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-686-E

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- WATER TOWER

HABS NO. SC-686-E

- Location: 900 King St., Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina. Located at the northern end of Colsterworth Avenue, this structure faces southeast toward Memorial Hall.
- Present Owner: The Board of Trustees of the William Enston Home.
- Present Occupant: Unoccupied.
- Present Use: Storage.
- Significance: The William Enston Home is an early example of benevolent, philanthropic housing for the elderly. Funded by a bequest of 1859, the complex was built between 1884 and 1888, with additional structures put up in 1893, 1927, and 1933. With its neat rows of detached, double cottages, set amid spacious, landscaped grounds, the Home provides an unusual and well-preserved example of nineteenth-century picturesque, suburban planning concepts adapted to this type of institutional function. On the regional level, few buildings in the Romanesque Revival style were built in this part of South Carolina; the Enston Home provides one of the pre-eminent local examples.
- The picturesque water tower was built as part of the Home's original water and sewage system.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1888.
2. Architect: Rudolph Hering, with W. B. W. Howe, Jr. Hering was a civil and sanitary engineer working out of Philadelphia, PA. He designed the sewage and water system for the Home, a task which seems also to have included the design of the Water Tower and Engine House. In 1886 his *Report on a System of Sewage for the William Enston Home* was published. As noted the overview (HABS No. SC-686, his recommendations here were instrumental in giving the site plan its current form.
3. Original and Subsequent Uses: Water tower; no longer functional.

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4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers: Not known. In a September 12, 1887, letter to the trustees, architect Howe asked to receive "Mr. Bowe's bid for putting up the Water Tower and Engine House at the Home." W. F. Bowe had been informed on August 1 that, following his work on the first five cottages, his contract would not be renewed for the completion of the next fourteen. It therefore seems unlikely that Bowe would have been asked to build the Water Tower and Engine House. Perhaps Howe simply wanted to compare Bowe's figures to other bids he had received.
5. Original Plans and Construction: Hering's 1886 *Report on a System of Sewage* mentions plans and sections for the Water Tower, but these have not been located. Hering provided the following description of the building:

To have an abundance of water for fire purposes and flushing the sewers, and also to avoid constant pumping, a large storage tank should be placed on the grounds. It must be elevated about 20 feet above the surface to deliver water at the second stories of the cottages. Its position and design are shown in the drawings. The tank is of wrought-iron, capable of holding about ten thousand gallons. It is built into a tower in which sufficient room is allowed to get around it. A slated floor permits thorough ventilation. Four high, narrow and barred windows below admit the air, and air-holes in the roof, concealed by small slates, allow it to escape. The belt courses are intended to be made of molded brick, the arches over the door and windows are of the same material, and the ornamental parts are of terra cotta. The inscription plate can be either of stone or terra cotta. The door is oak with wrought-or cast-iron hinges and fittings.

6. Alterations and Additions: There have been no additions to this structure.

By the late 1970s the board of trustees noted in its monthly meeting minutes that the roof was badly damaged. According to Superintendent Helton, it was removed in 1988 and has not been replaced. Originally it was an eight-sided conical roof, supported by a wood frame, and covered with painted metal shingles.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Standing like a medieval defensive structure at the northern end of tree-lined Colsterworth Avenue, the circular-plan Water Tower is one of the most romantic, picturesque features of the Home site. Though utilitarian in nature, the tower nonetheless received careful attention from its

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designers. Its rather elaborate entrance announces it as a structure of importance, while the belt coursing, cornices, and differentiated levels (the ground level is circular; the upper level is octagonal) provide textural richness and visual interest.

2. Condition of Fabric: The Water Tower is in poor condition. During the late 1980s its original conical roof was entirely removed, so the building now stands open and filled with pigeons. The iron water tank, though rusted through, is still in place.

B. Description of Exterior:

The two-story, circular-plan tower with octagonal second story is 17' in exterior diameter, 54' in exterior circumference, and about 36' high. Foundations are red brick slab, while the 12" thick load-bearing walls are made of stretcher-bond red brick with red mortar. A line of brick belt coursing and terra cotta egg and dart molding lies directly above the lintels of the first-floor windows. Level with the base of the south-side pediment is a band of concrete belt coursing (though like Howe with the cottages, Hering had specified stone). At the springer level of the second-story round-arched windows is another row of concrete belt coursing, with a shell pattern pressed into it. There are corbelled brick cornices between the first and second levels and at the roof line; that at the roof line includes one band of concrete. A concrete pent roof is located between the building's first and second levels.

On the building's south side is a projecting, pedimented portico, approached by three slate steps. The cornice of the concrete pediment is broken by the round-arched top of the recessed, six-panel wood door. There are four horizontal bands in the pediment, with two bands of pressed shell ornament and the words "WILLIAM ENSTON HOME" in raised letters (the T is missing) in between. A sunburst motif fills the pediment's peak.

On the ground floor are four narrow, rectangular windows with concrete sills and brick lintels. On the second floor are four narrow, round-arched, double-hung sash windows with concrete arches above, and oversize keystones and ornamented springers. Most of the windows are boarded up and none any longer contain glass or bars.

C. Description of Interior:

The interior is a cylindrical dirt-floored, open space divided into two parts. Below, four brick piers along the interior walls support two iron I-beams, which in turn support wood floor beams and the wrought-iron water tank above. An iron ladder leads from ground level up the west side of the interior to the platform supporting the tank.

The building is without mechanical equipment, other than the water tank and a 4" iron pipe running between it and the ground.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

See overview (HABS No. SC-686).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the William Enston Home was undertaken during the summer of 1993 by the Washington Office of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. The principals involved were Robert J. Kapsch, HABS/HAER Division Chief, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS. The project was sponsored by the Historic Charleston Foundation, Lawrence Walker, Executive Director, and Jonathan H. Poston, Director of Preservation Programs. Additional support was provided by the Charleston Housing Authority, Don Cameron, Director, and the Enston Home Board of Trustees, Park Smith, Chairman. The measured drawings were executed under the direction of Frederick J. Lindstrom, HABS Staff Architect. The field recording was conducted by Project Supervisor Douglas S. Anderson and Architecture Technicians John M. Biggs and M. Douglas Godfrey. Under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Senior Historian, the historical report and written building surveys were produced by Keith L. Eggener, the 1993 Sally Kress Tompkins Fellow of the Society of Architectural Historians and HABS. Recognition should also go to Paul Helton, Superintendent of the William Enston Home, for his cooperation and assistance.

ADDENDUM TO:
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